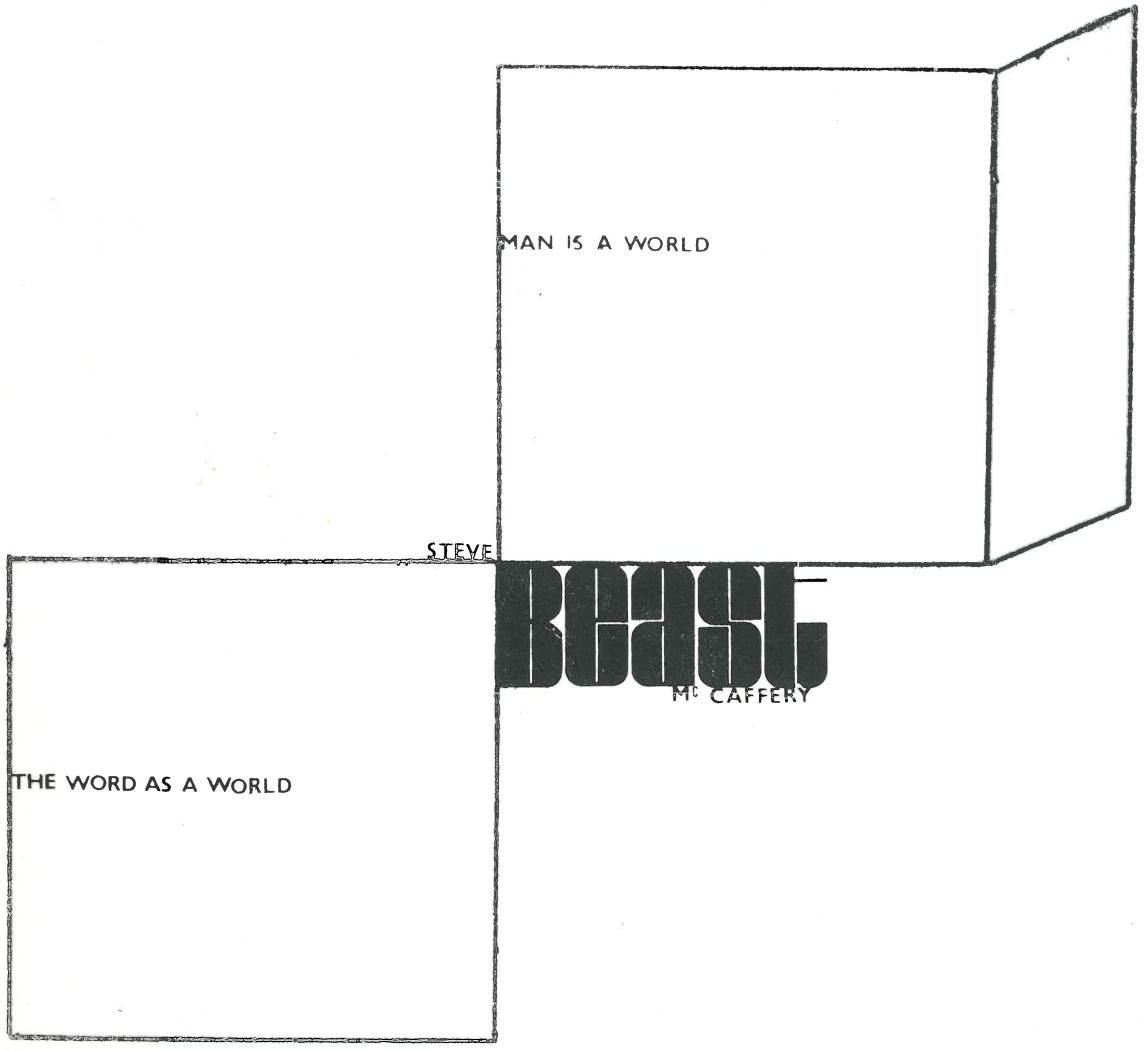
6-3/3

TRANSITIONS TO THE



transitions to the beast

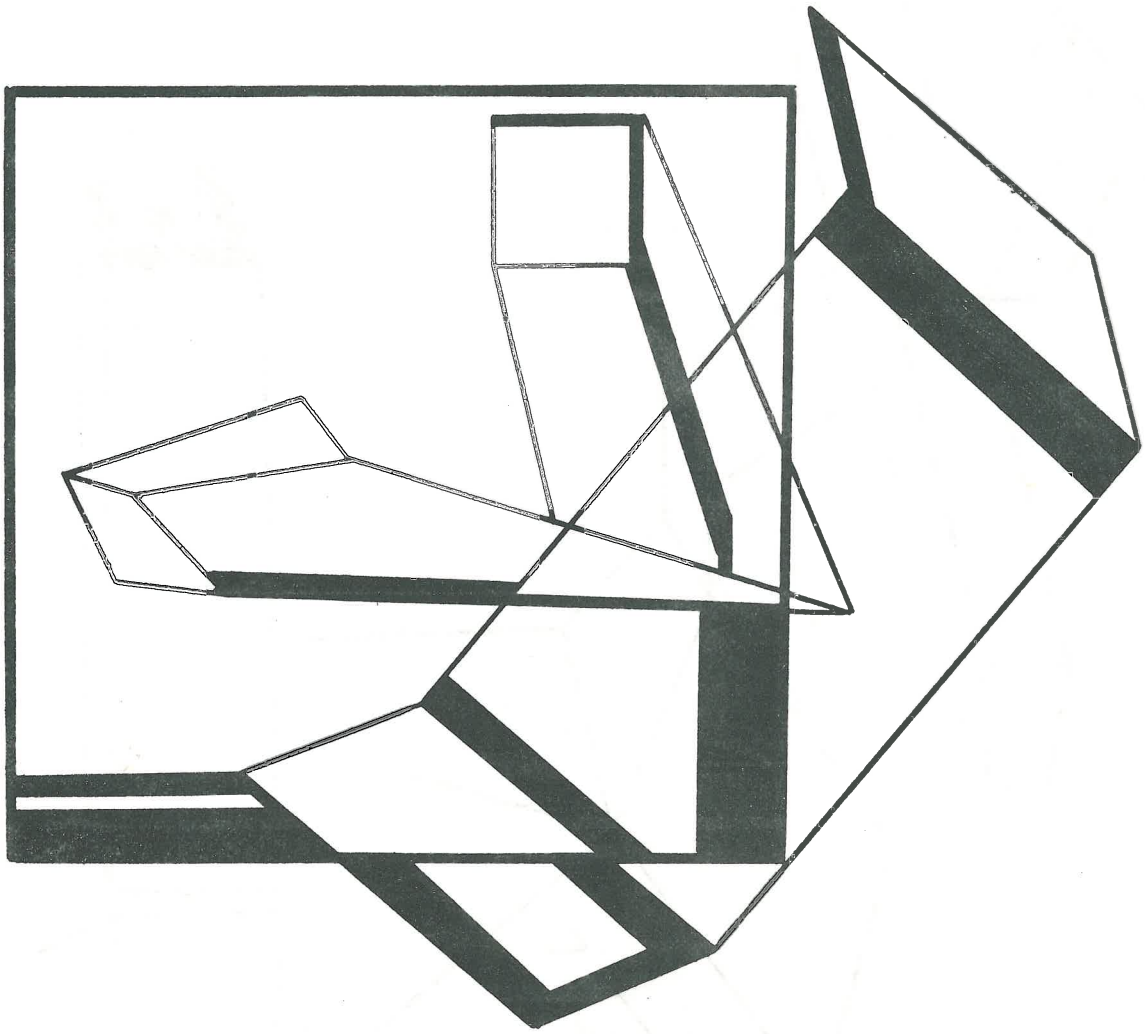
post
semiotic
poems
by
steve
mc
caffery

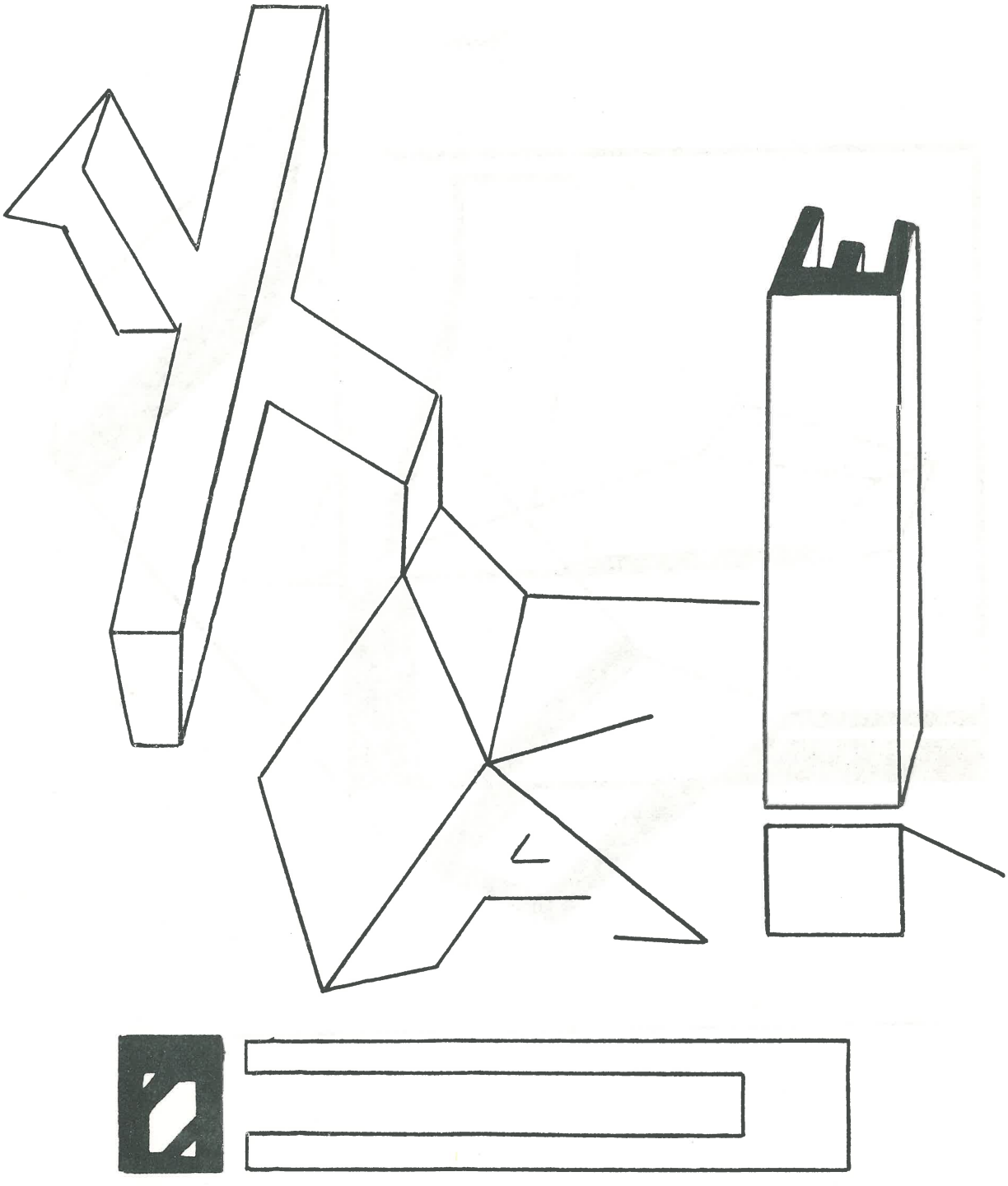
published as gr o nk series six nos. 2&3

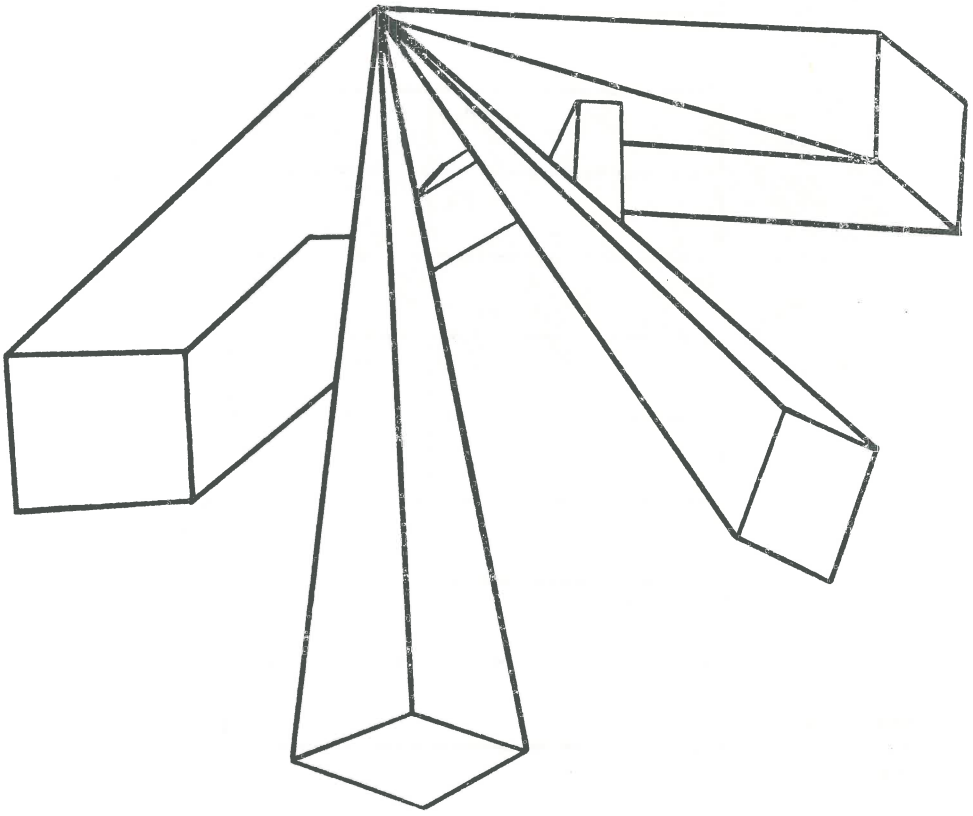
1 9 7 0 august

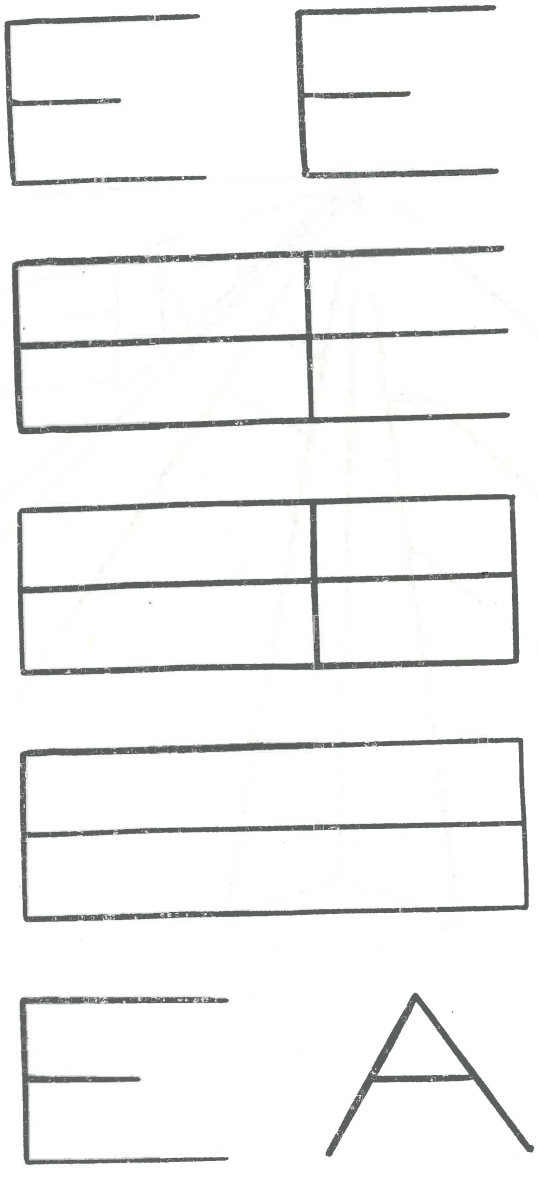
G A N G L I A P R E S S

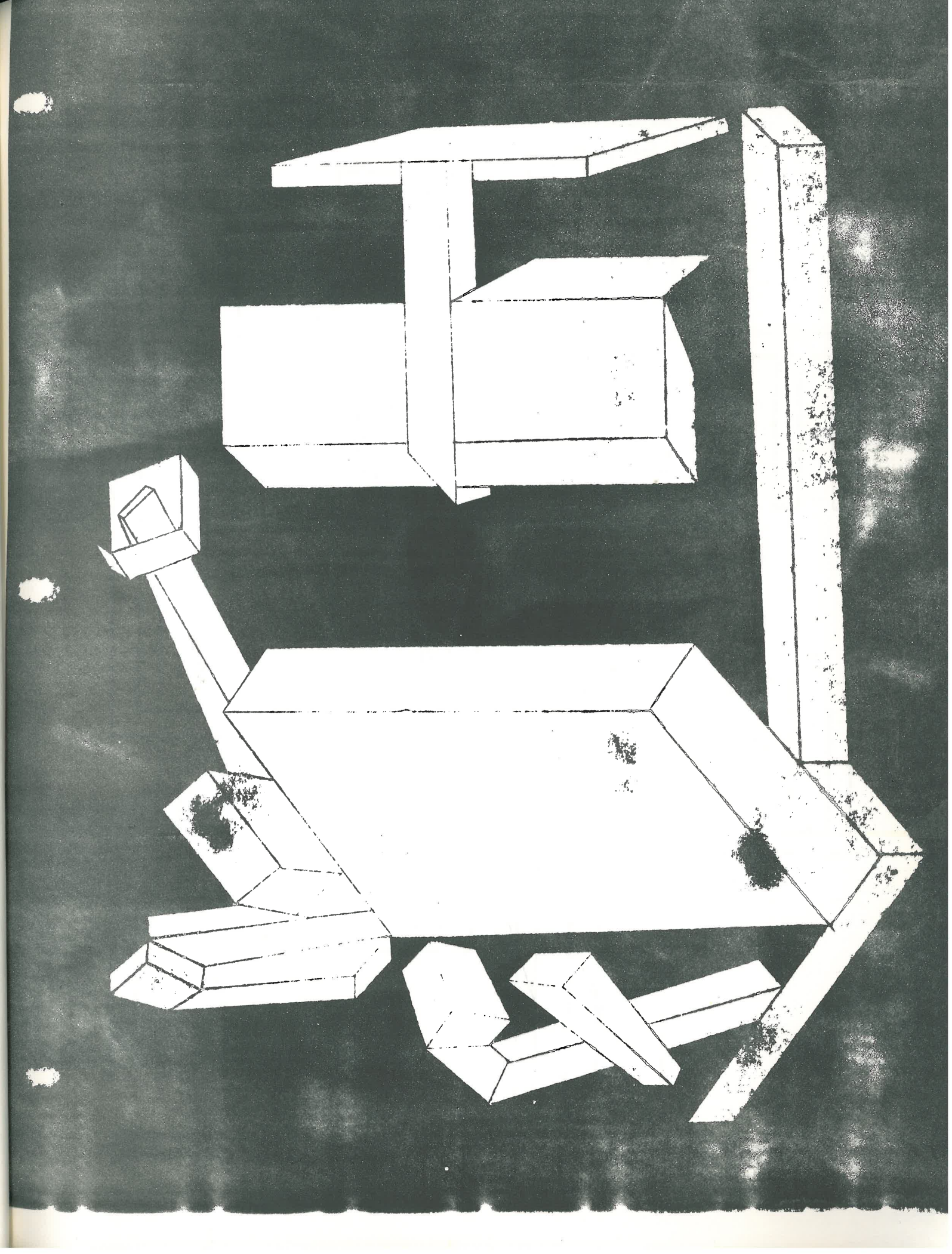
TORONTO

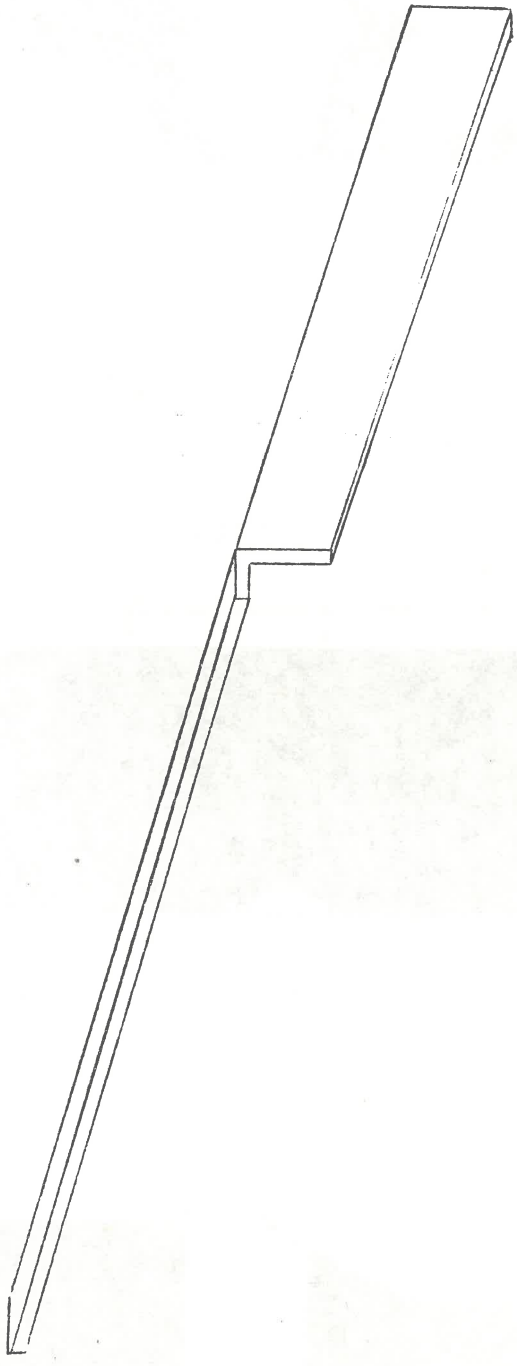


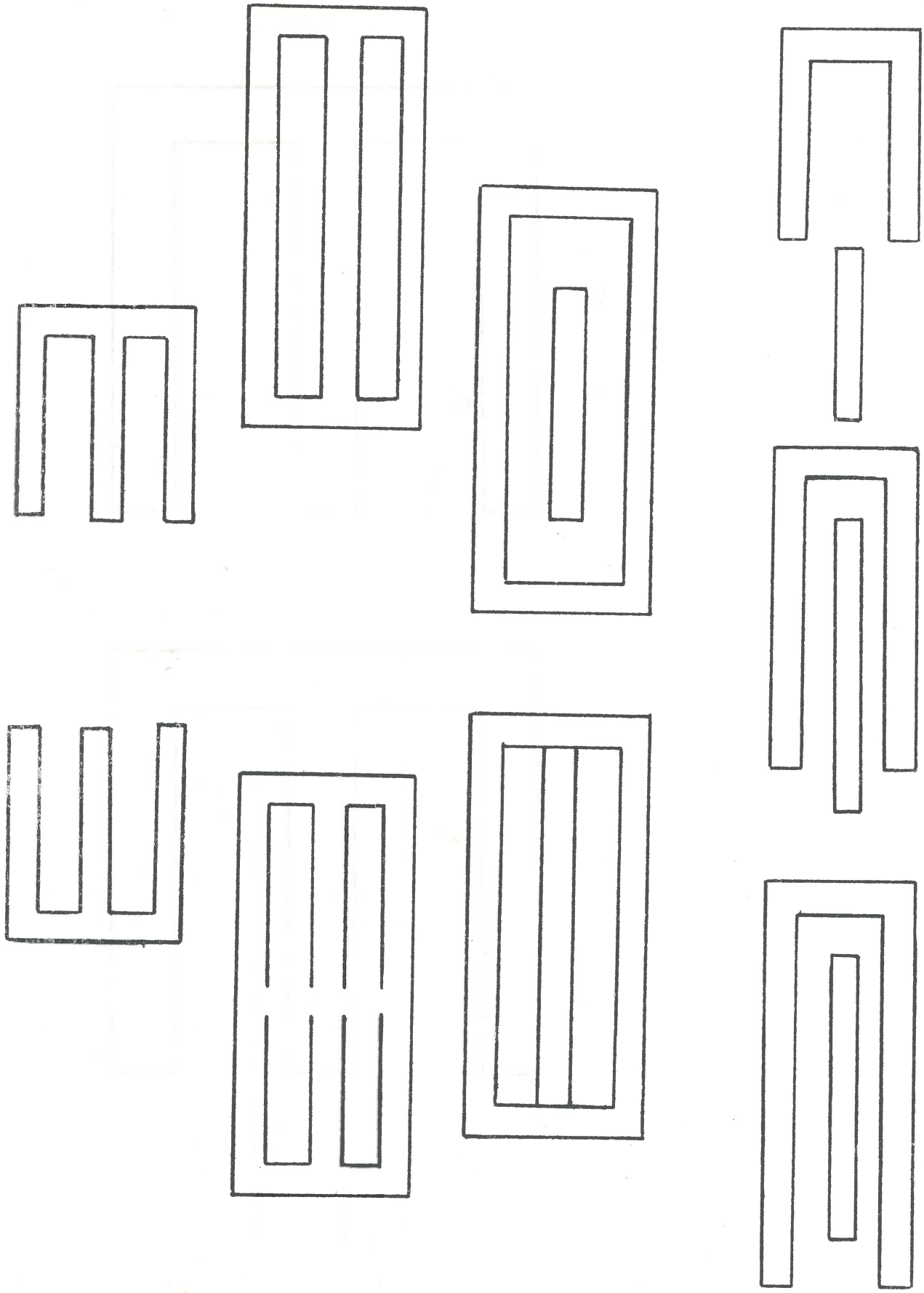


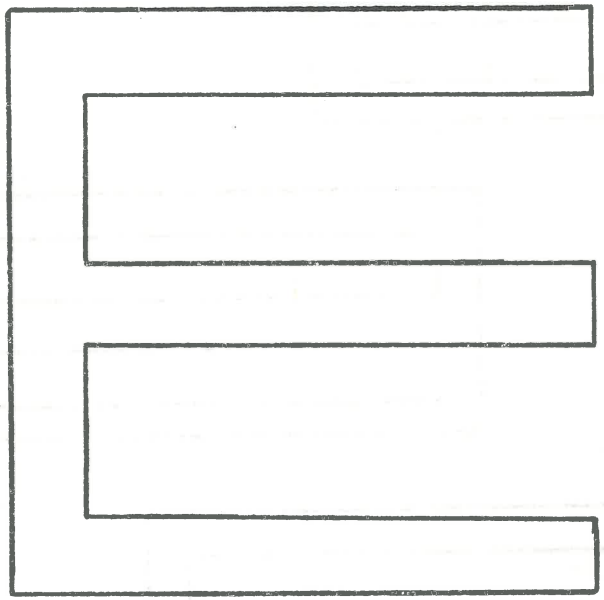




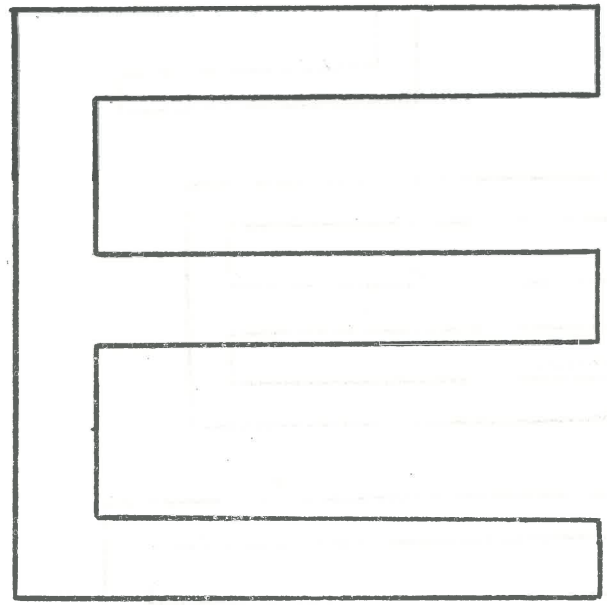




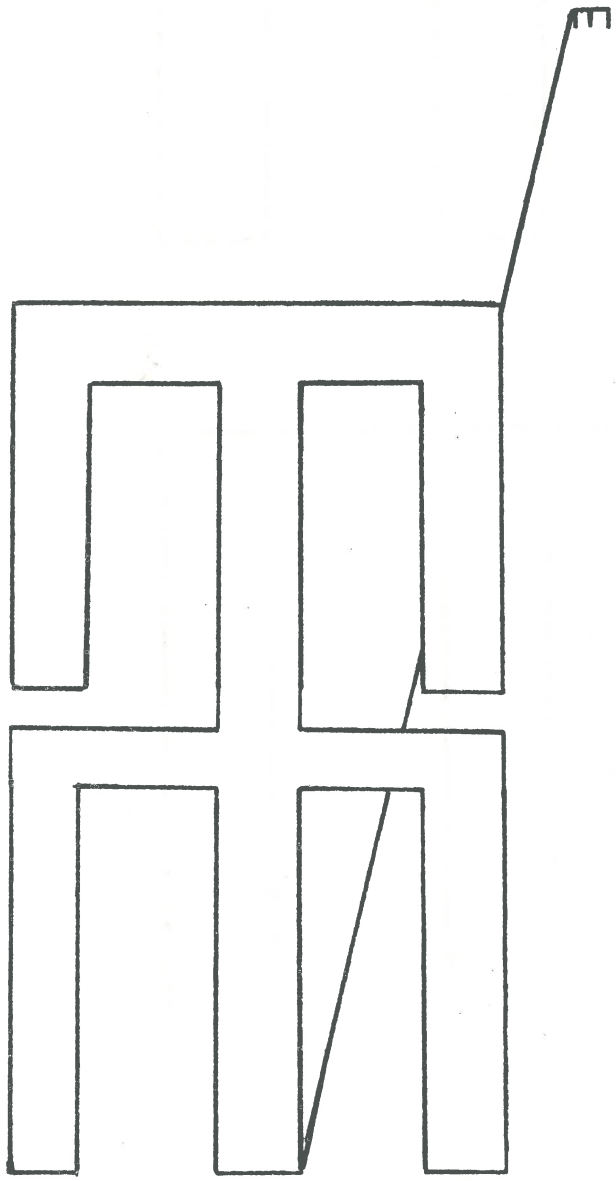


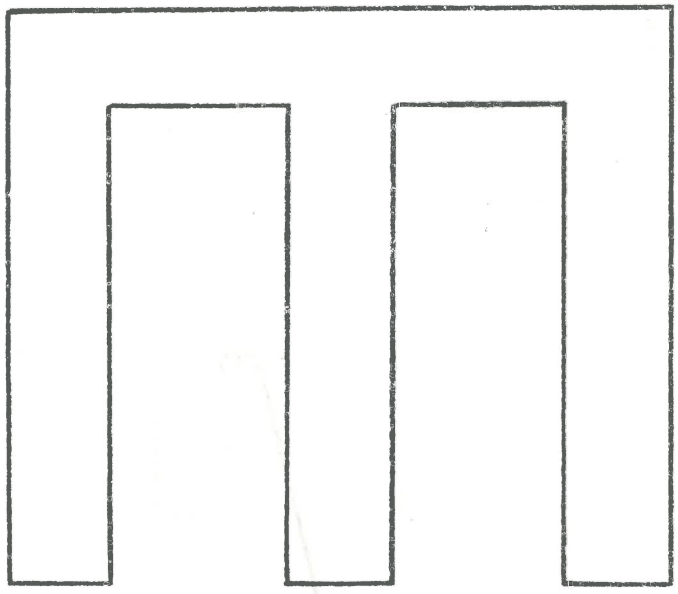


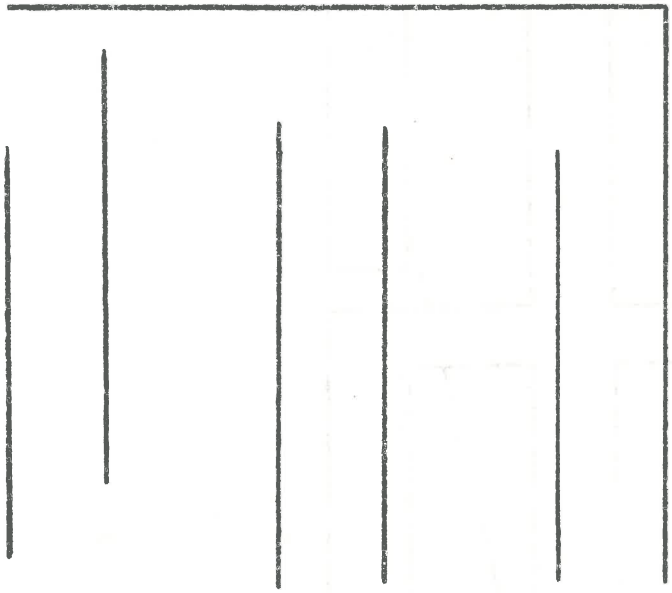
ee

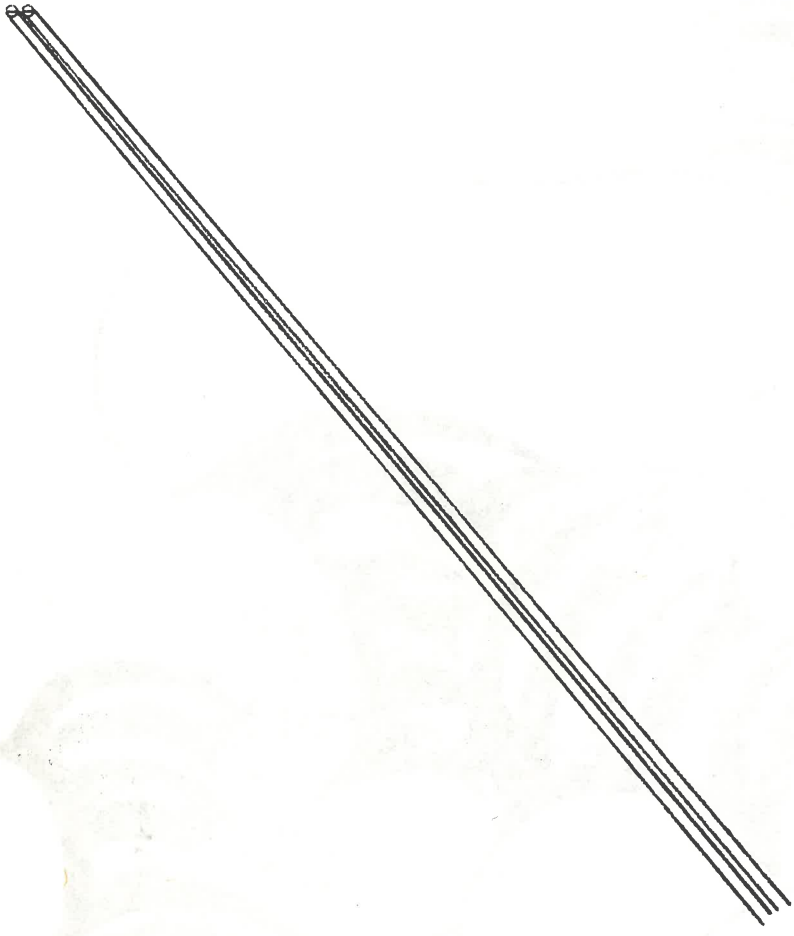


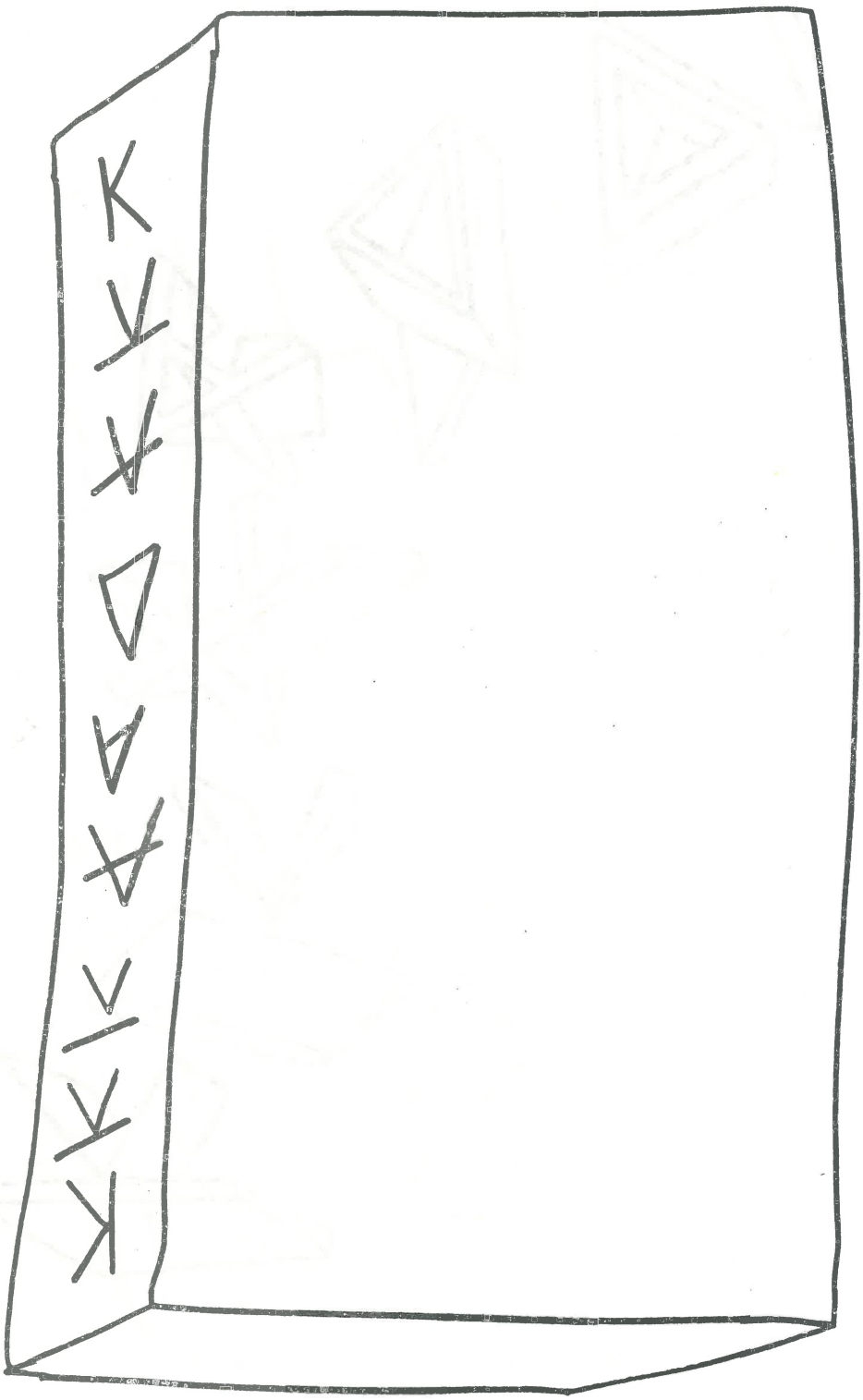
ee

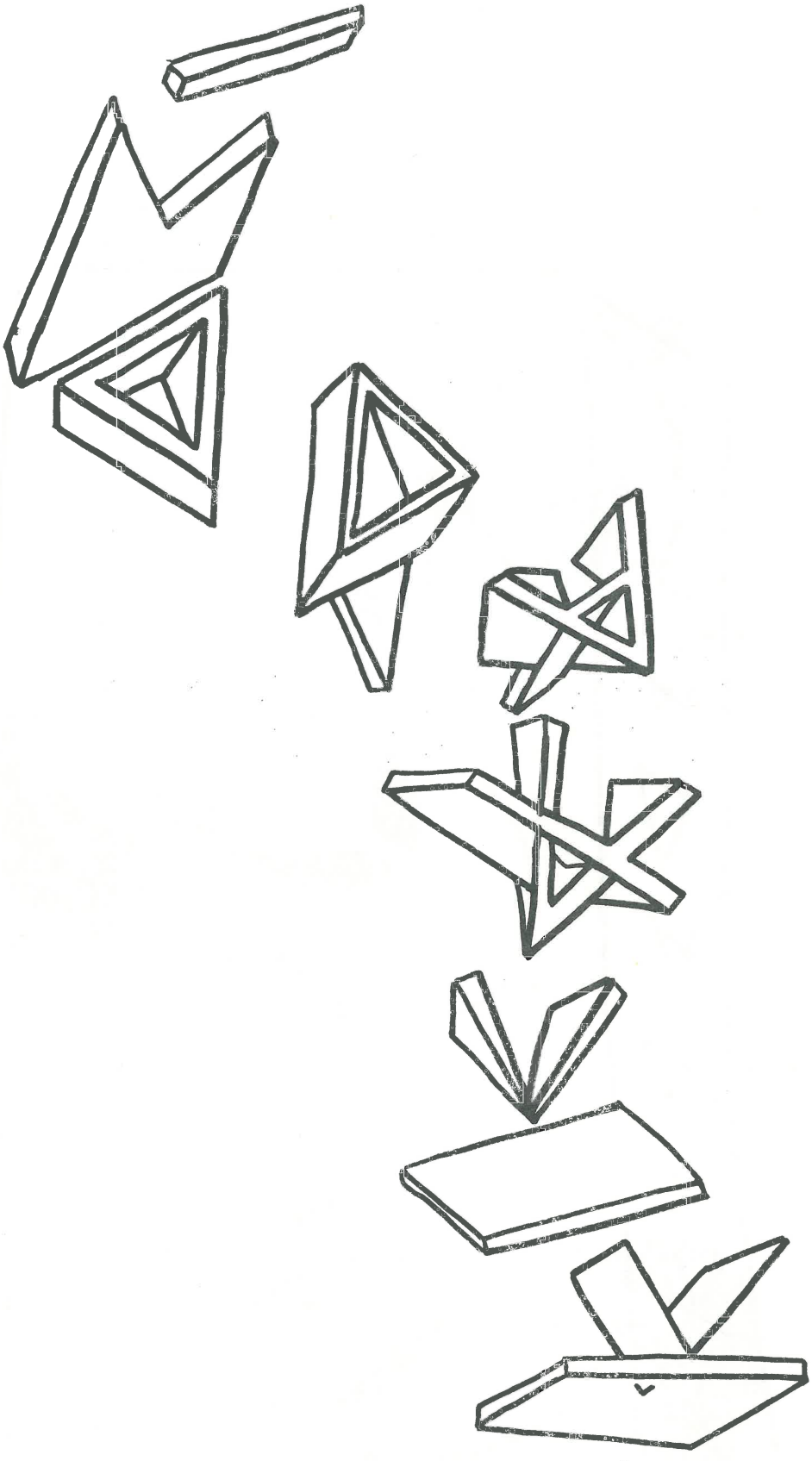


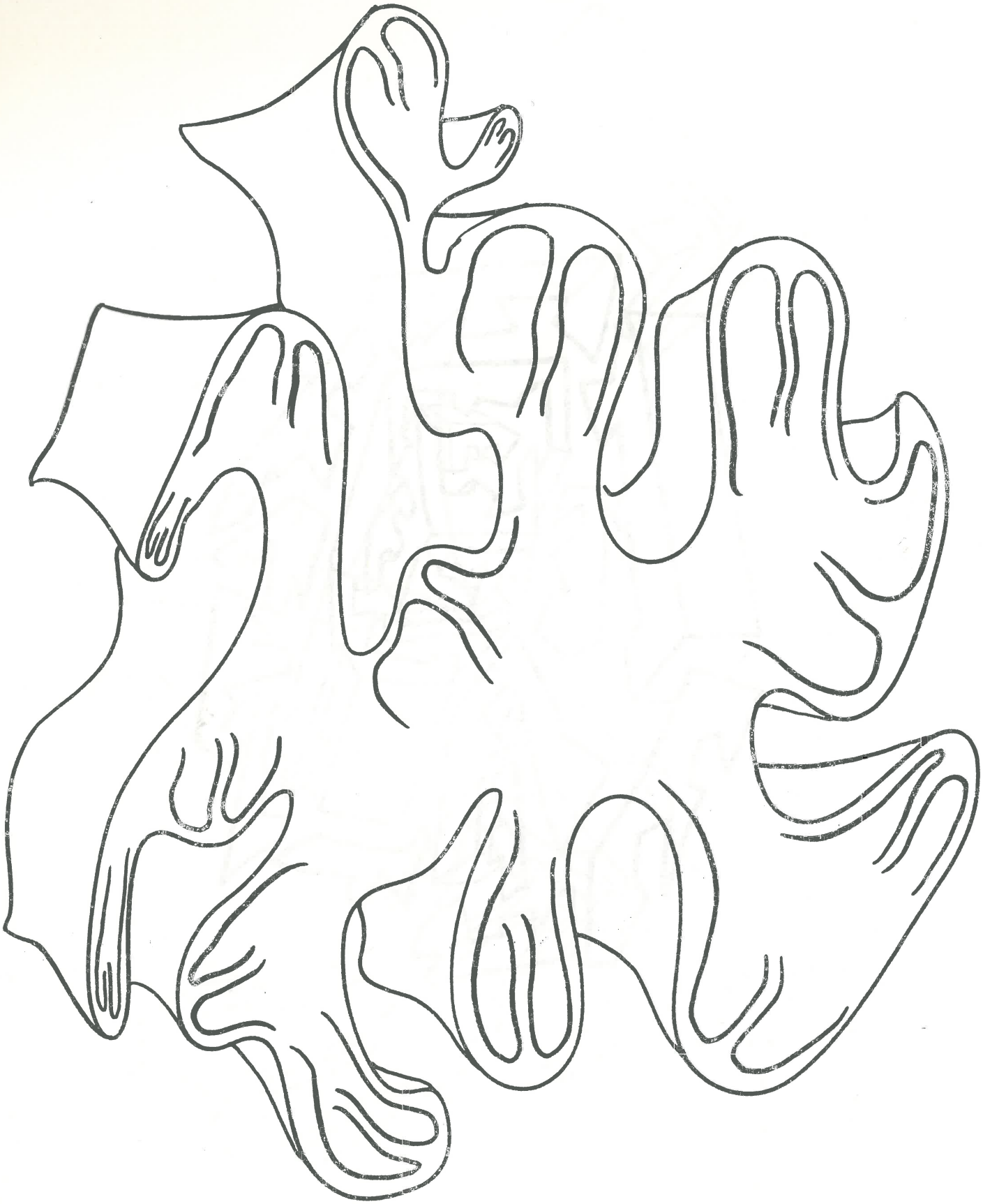


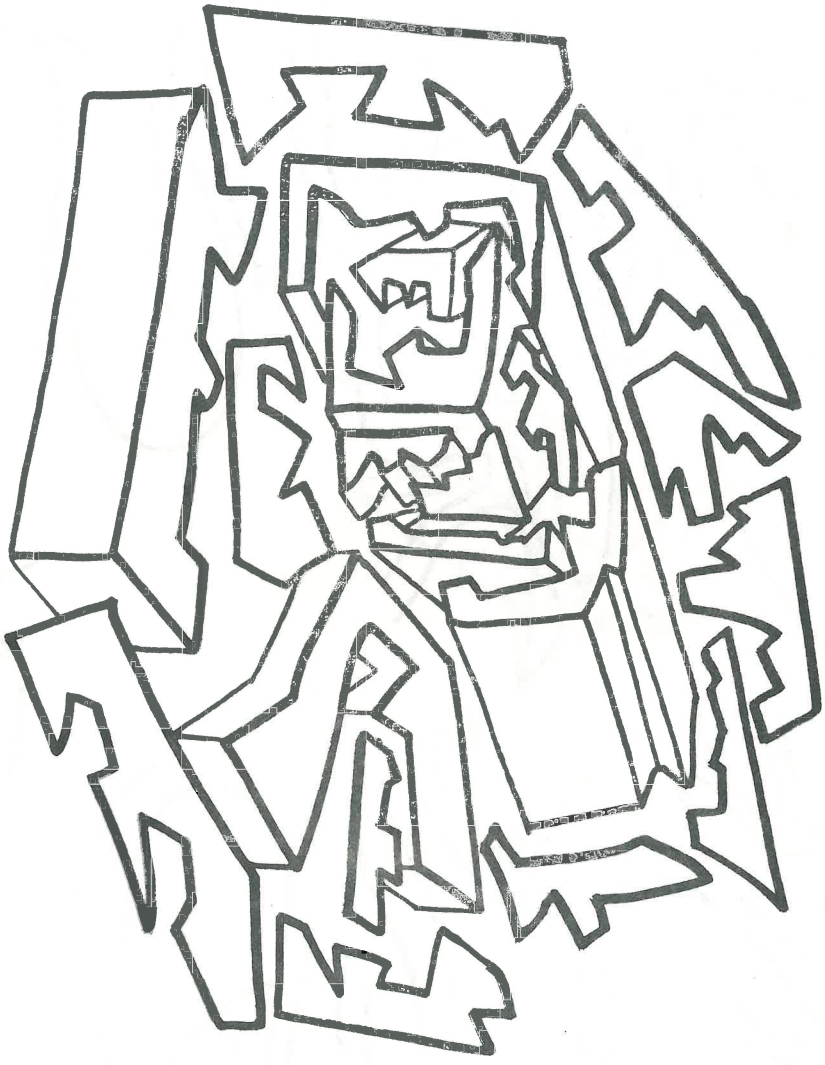


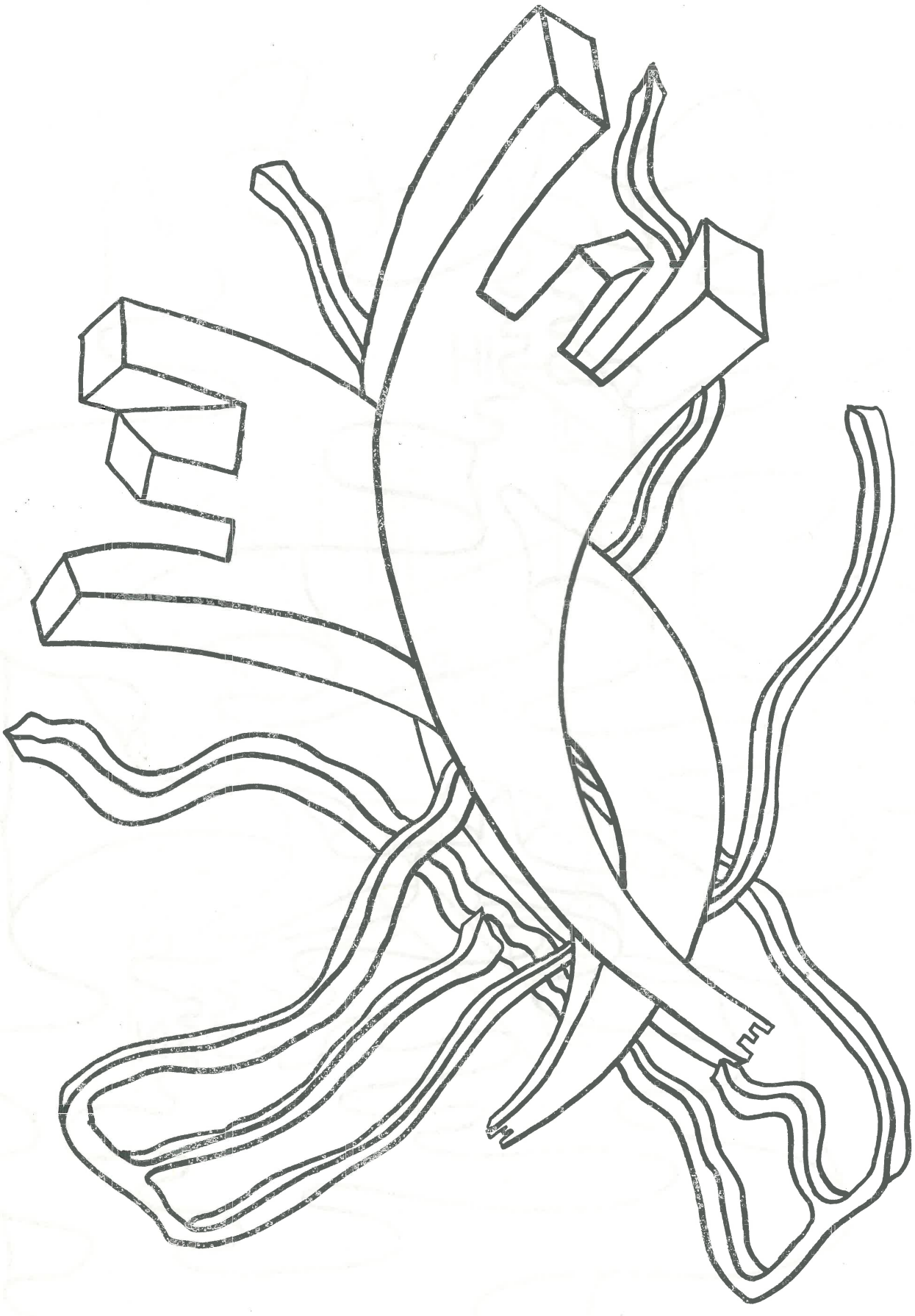


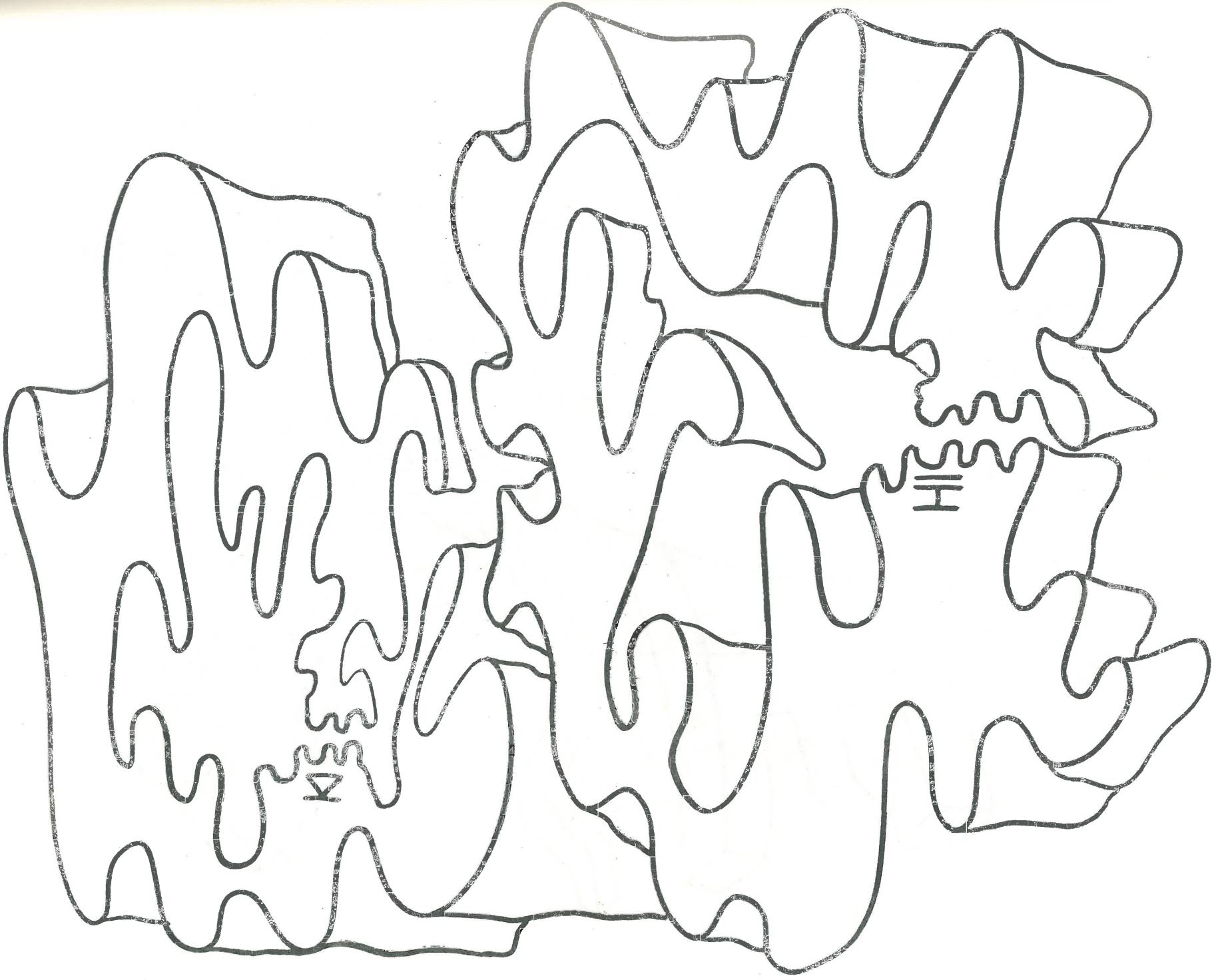


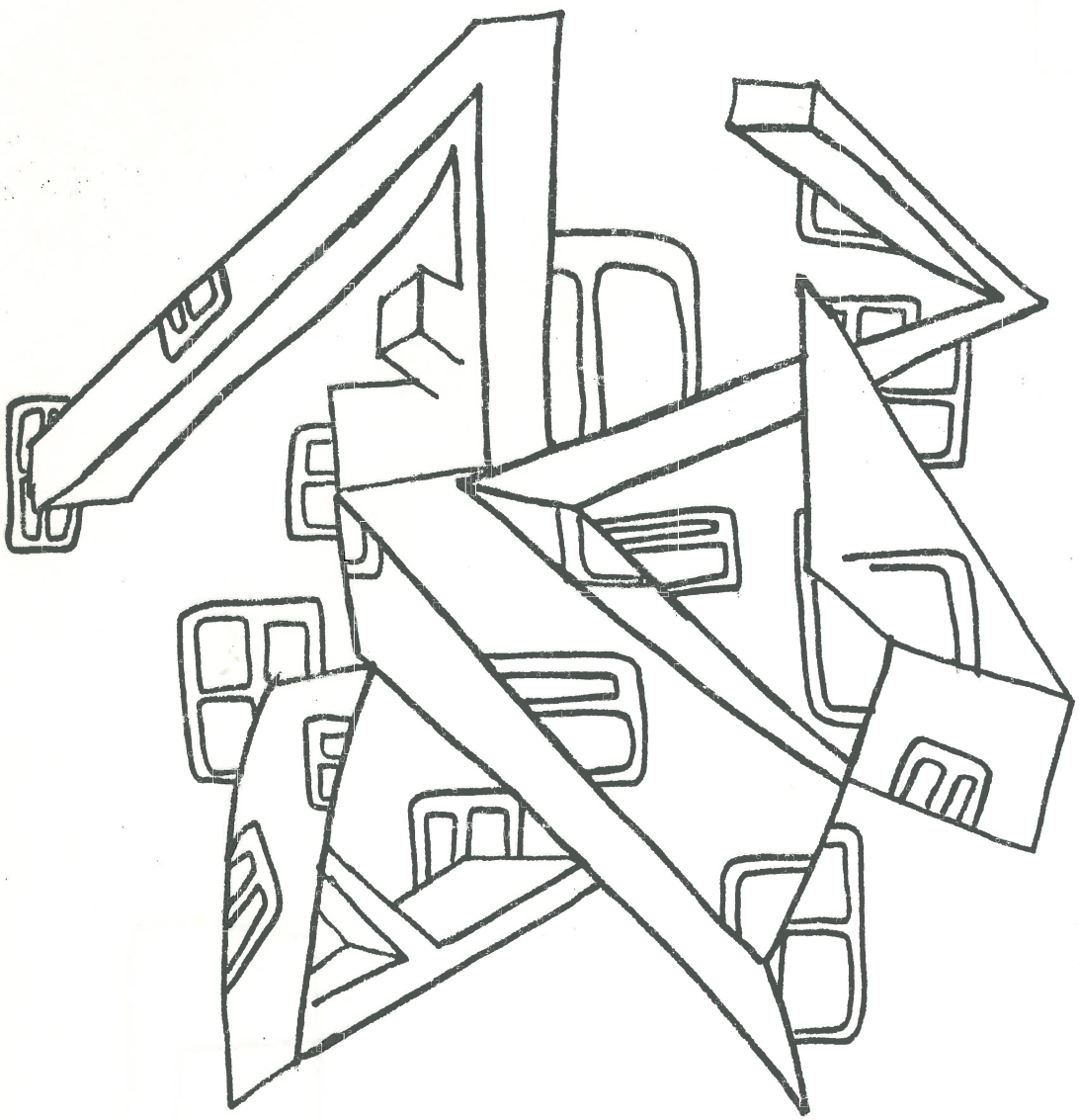


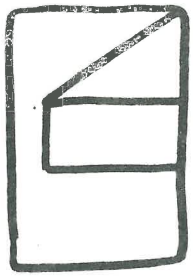


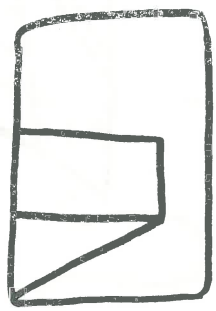












aftermath

to the beast are for me transitional pieces moving towards a hand drawn set of visual conventions that have their roots both in semiotic poetry & in the comic strip. the semiotic or code poem (invented round about 1964 by the brazilians pignatari & pinto) uses a language of visual signs designed & constructed to suit the individual desires of the poet & the needs that he as linguistic designer assumes for the poem on that particular occasion of construction.

the striking impulse behind this type of poem is both alinear & nonlexical - the desire to expand language beyond the single limited form of verbal expression. however the abandoning of traditional verbal form in favour of a set of visual signs anchored in functionality & pragmatism has not produced a truly verbally liberated poetry for the ultimate recourse to a lexical key in order to supply a verbal definition of the signs (which most semioticists apparently feel necessary) radically neutralizes if not destroys all the professed nonlexical directions of this form of poetry. in addition to the felt necessity for a lexical support most code poems that i have seen assume the form of a successive order of coded states using in fact an episodic technique on the visual sign level to express changes in state & preserving thereby that sense of arrested flow characteristic of linear based language.

the earlier poems in this book are experiments around these two problems e.g. in the use of 3 dimensional syntax & the general complication of the visual level of information to a point beyond the one to one relationship of key & sign. the desire was to attain a cool code (low definition) a language of immediate & tight visual impact with no spatial separation to assist poetic movement creative involvement on the readers part & the expression of single complex relationships in preference to the presentation of developing content (im thinking of such secular relationships as man to language man is a world & the word as a world.)

most of the poems are built from the single letter E which functions in the series as a single nonspecific sign or potential code (sometimes using other letters such as K & M but for the same purpose sometimes a combination of more than one but for the same purpose) the manipulation of perspective and shape of the letter is the basic syntactic tool relating letters to letters & elements of the single letter to other elements.

the later poems deepen the search for visual conventions to help extend my own range of expression & especially to carry suggestions of the weight & bulk of language (language as weight linguistic weight as history not the history of language but the language as history as bp nichol once said) that this may oppose many features of semiotic poetry doesnt worry me the semiotic form acted only as the initial impulse to search for a nonlexical sign language increasingly (& this inspite of this afterblurb) im feeling the need for a more rawly human & a less technocratic approach to borderblur for a greater degree of idiosyncratic expression as far as this helps present the poets own perceptual system entry in short of more personal feeling & due attention to our more simplistic responses to & in front of language.

at the time of writing i felt strongly the need to present my own personal & still emerging system to achieve this end with any degree of satisfaction involved me in a return to the hand as the basis of composition & in a return to the line as distinct from linearity & into manual construction as a part step in bringing poetry back to the body where it truly belongs.

transitions to the beast have an increasingly diminishing relevance to my current spaces they have served a function & thats why they are being published now in the hope that they might still have relevance to others.

not so depressed as me smcc.